MAASTRICHT
QUESTIONS and ANSWERS

1. For a start, what is Maastricht?

Maastricht is the city in Holland where the Treaty on European Union was agreed by EC heads of government last December. The Treaty proposes to extend and develop EC influence in each member state, in areas such as the economy, foreign policy and common security.

2. What is the Protocol?

The Protocol is an addition to the Treaty made on the proposal of the Irish government without any reference to or approval by the Dáil. It states:

"Nothing in the Treaty on European Union, or in the Treaties establishing the European Communities, or in the Treaties or Acts modifying or supplementing those Treaties, shall affect the application in Ireland of Article 40.3.3. of the Constitution of Ireland."

It was inserted at the behest of the so-called pro-life lobby to prevent abortion legislation ever being introduced in Ireland. The recent Supreme Court case involving a 14 year old pregnant girl, however, found that the wording of the 1983 referendum on abortion permits abortion where the life or health of the mother is in danger.

3. Isn't there a referendum on the matter in the Autumn?

The Protocol has created unnecessary legal and political problems, which would be best resolved if it were removed altogether and resolved through legislation in Ireland.

Instead the government has promised a referendum in the autumn. The wording is not yet published and it may well deny women the right to travel for, or to have an abortion in Ireland - even if her life or health is threatened. This is totally unacceptable.

4. Didn't the government get a 'Solemn Declaration' from the other member states about Travel and Information. Isn't that good enough?

That Solemn Declaration has no legal standing, it is a political statement. It also leaves open the denial of rights in next autumn's referendum and as such is a like buying pig in a poke.

5. What affect will Economic and Monetary Union have on Ireland?

The Treaty obliges Ireland to achieve lower government borrowing and low inflation very quickly. This will put immediate pressure on wages, living standards and jobs. Many of the changes involved in Economic and Monetary Union are already underway under the Single Market, allowing free movement of people, money, goods and services throughout the Community. But unemployment is soaring, interest rates remain high, and inflation is sneaking up again. The trend will continue under the Maastricht Treaty unless corrective policies are adopted at EC level.

6. So just what is required?

What **is** required, and is not provided for, is an EC wide policy to develop the economies of poorer regions like Ireland, to create jobs and bring living standards closer to the EC average. That means an EC wide Industrial Policy. It would ensure that employment lost through the effects of the Single Market is replaced - a type of 'positive discrimination' to combat the negative affect of becoming part of the much bigger EC economy, of which we comprise less than 2%.

7. If I'm looking for a job, is there anything in it for me? The government say there will be 50,000 jobs from Maastricht.

Maastricht is not about creating jobs, or ensuring that existing jobs are well paid and secure. It's about making the economies of member states more competitive, with the hope that jobs will follow. All the evidence suggests that new employment will be created in the already overdeveloped centre of the Community, while peripheral regions like Ireland continue to suffer unemployment and emigration.

The policy should be to bring jobs to people rather than forcing Irish (or Portuguese or Greek or southern Italian) workers to travel to other countries to find the jobs. Again Maastricht doesn't deliver.

8. What about the £6 billion we are promised over the next five years if we accept the Treaty?

£6 billion is what the government are looking for. There is only a political agreement to provide help - the amount is not agreed. We may get an amount close to that, but the real issue is how it will be used. We received £3 billion under the current Structural Funds but apart from many new roads there have been no long term jobs created. Another point is that these figures may sound large, but the £6 billion is less than the amount given in gross tax breaks to industry in this country over the past decade. The government never admit to that statistic as a huge amount!

9. How democratic is the EC? Has the European Parliament received any new powers?

The European Parliament has been given some additional functions in areas such as cultural and consumer policy. In many cases, however, the Parliament need only be 'consulted' - then ignored. The centre of power is increasingly with the Council of Ministers. The Council comprises the heads of government and their Ministers, who meet in virtual secrecy to decide what's best for the Community's 350 million citizens. Irish government Ministers attend these meetings without any reference to the Dáil and without any formal report back or accountability procedure.

10. So what's all the talk of a 'Citizens' Europe'?

It's far down the priority list. Local communities and specific interest groups are allowed little say on the development of EC policy, at regional, member state or central Brussels levels. Local democracy is not a winner in this Treaty. Unless rectified, it could lead to increasing alienation of people from 'Brussels', thereby threatening the concept of European Union in the long run. The Treaty talks of 'subsidiarity' or decision making at the lowest effective level, but in practice more powers will concentrate in fewer people in Brussels.

11. What about the issue of a 'Social Europe'?

Because of British government objections, progress on the 'Social Charter' on workers' rights has been stalled in the Treaty. The Community has agreed to go ahead on an 'Action Programme' on a section which is neither legal nor binding and refers to 'workers' rather than other vulnerable sections like women, young people, disabled, senior citizens. The Treaty fails to advance or broaden the scope of social legislation.

12. What about Irish neutrality and European defence?

Co-operation between EC states has been in operation since the '70's. Ireland rarely takes a position at international level without reference to the '12' member states. The new Treaty has a Common

Foreign and Security Policy section. It covers all 'questions related to the security of the European Union, including the framing of a common defense policy, which might in time lead to a common defense.' Common defense is not specifically covered or for adoption in the present Treaty, but is on the agenda for 1996.

13. Will Ireland be forced to join a military alliance? Will there be conscription?

For now defence matters will be effectively 'sub-contracted' to the Western European Union, with an agreement to re-examine the situation in 1996. In the meantime, however, t'ere will be an increasing overlap between WEU and the EC. With the WEU up for renewal in 1998, it is almost certain that its role will be taken over by the EC.

Ireland is not at present a member of the WEU. Last year, without any reference to the Dail, the government began attending WEU meetings as an 'Observer', later explaining they wished to keep in contact with the emerging crisis in Yugoslavia. We may well join WEU in future, or we could join a European Defense Union if one is established possibly as early as 1996. This would be three years before the final stages of EMU, as outlined in the present Treaty, are implemented. Conscription is not provided for in the Treaty but young Irish people could be recruited into a new, nuclear based European army after 1996.

14. So our neutrality could come to an end?

Our present 'neutrality' is already largely a sham. Ireland provided military access to Shannon and overflights for planes bringing troops and weapons to the Gulf war in a way that other neutral European countries did not. During the '80's Ireland refused to support proposals at U.N. level to end the civil war in Nicaragua, including one from the French government, in deference to the US government. We need to define a new security policy for the EC and not retain a fictional notion of Ireland as a neutral country.

15. What sort of EC security policy is required?

It should be non-nuclear, it should be pro-peace. It should **not** involve the EC becoming a new superpower with the aim of controlling or intervening militarily in developing countries. Ireland should play a full role in developing such a policy, to ensure that when a promised referendum on defense is held in 1996, we are not confronted with a fait accompli, which citizens will be warned to reject at their peril.

16. Is that not pie in the sky?

No. Many of the Community's citizens do not want an extension of British and French nuclear weapons policy throughout the Community. Countries likely to join the EC over the next few years, like Sweden, Austria and Finland, have a tradition of neutrality. Ireland should work closely with them to tilt security and defense policy in the right direction. Remember, European Union is only being constructed. What it becomes, and whether it will remain acceptable to the people of Europe, will depend on the type of structures that are agreed.

17. Why do we need a Treaty and a referendum?

The Community cannot act in new areas unless it has a legal basis to do so. To implement the proposals in the Maastricht Treaty, a referendum is required to amend the Irish constitution.

18. But if we vote 'NO' won't we be put out of Europe?

If a majority vote 'no' the Treaty of Rome (1957) and Single European Act (1987) will remain in force. It will be an 'as you were' situation in Ireland. All member states, however, are anxious to continue the process of European union. The next meeting of EC heads of government would discuss the Irish situation, with a view to

bringing Ireland aboard under revised terms. How much could be changed would depend on the determination of Irish negotiators. The British have already negotiated an 'opt out' of the entire social policy section. Ireland could seek alterations on the economic, democracy and security and defense provisions.

19. But if the Treaty is renegotiated we might get less. Aren't the Germans having second thoughts on European Union?

The Treaty as it stands is not good enough. We are not guaranteed the additional funding promised, it runs for only five years, and it is not linked to policies that will create more jobs and decent living standards in Ireland.

20. But all the other parties, including Labour, support the Treaty, why is Democratic Left against Europe?

Democratic Left fully supports European Union. But the Treaty that will bring it is about is seriously flawed, on equality issues, on economic, democracy and security matters. It does not cater for the needs of poorer regions like Ireland. It is a missed opportunity to finally bring Ireland into the European mainstream on jobs, living standards and prosperity. If we flunk the chance now, there may not be a next time. Vote No to bring about a better Treaty.

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